

# DEMOCRACY VOLUNTEERS

DENMARK KOMMUNE AND  
REGIONAL ELECTIONS 2021

Final Report



Democracy  
**Volunteers**

the election observers



# Danish Kommune and Regional Elections

## 16<sup>th</sup> November 2021

### Final Report on Election Observation

#### Objectives

1. To objectively observe the referendum process in Denmark.
2. To advise election officials on the results of the observation for the improvement of the electoral practice.
3. To support these election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

#### Executive Summary

The elections, based on the sample we observed, were very well run by elections staff and additional COVID-19 precautions were handled well. The observation team, in the vast majority of cases, were impressed by the conduct of staff throughout polling day.

Family Voting was identified by our observers at 11% (9 of 85) polling stations. Family Voting is the practice by which one member of a family influences or guides another on the way to cast their vote and is described by the OSCE/ODIHR as an 'unacceptable practice'<sup>1</sup>. Whilst overall cases of family voting were low, Democracy Volunteers would encourage a proactive approach by staff to prevent such occurrences taking place which did occur in some cases, though not always. Indeed, on some occasions, staff did intercede to prevent it. Generally, our observers were greeted warmly by elections staff wherever they visited polling stations and counting. The team also held constructive meetings with interlocutors, such as election administrators and political parties, in the days preceding polling day. In total, the observation team attended 85 polling stations across 9 Kommune areas.

Despite the well-organised and well-resourced election being well conducted, our team believes that Denmark should urgently look at the provisions of the OSCE Copenhagen Document (1990). Denmark is a signatory, and was the official host, to the Copenhagen conference at which it was signed. Denmark has no provision for election observers in its legislation, but because polling stations are generally considered open and public, election observation is 'allowed' if not 'approved'.

However, on three occasions on election day Democracy Volunteers' observers were either barred, obstructed, or removed from polling stations by election administrators, one group was even told to leave the polling station, or the staff would call the police to enforce this. On all occasions our observers complied with requests made of them by administrators, despite it not being within the spirit or accepted practice in Denmark. All three of these events took place within the City of Copenhagen and none in other Kommune areas where we were very welcome to observe. Once notified of these events, our core team contacted the Copenhagen electoral authorities and apologies were given for these events.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.osce.org/>

## Observer Team



**Dr John Ault FRSA FRGS (United Kingdom)** was the Head of Mission for the Danish Election Observation Mission and is the Executive Director of Democracy Volunteers.

John has worked in elections throughout the UK, Europe, and the United States since the 1980s. He has observed on behalf of the OSCE/ODIHR in parliamentary elections as far afield as Kazakhstan and is a former chair of the UK's Electoral Reform Society. He has also been elected to local government in the UK as well as being appointed to the South West Regional Assembly.

He has observed numerous elections for Democracy Volunteers, including the Norwegian parliamentary elections, the UK general elections in 2017 and 2019, the Finnish presidential and parliamentary elections in 2018 and 2019 as well as Dutch elections in 2017, 2018 and 2019. He has also been an academic consultant about electoral and parliamentary reform in Moldova. He is also an electoral expert for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

He is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter and has previously lectured at Canterbury Christ Church University and the University of Manchester. He specialises in elections and campaigns and has published several books on the subject, including his doctoral thesis on electoral campaigning.



**Harry Busz (United Kingdom)** is Democracy Volunteers' full-time Head of Operations. He was Deputy Head of Mission for the deployment to Denmark. He is a graduate in Human Geography at Cardiff University and an MA in International Relations from Exeter University.

He has participated in multiple domestic and international observations such as the 2019 local elections in Northern Ireland, the provincial and Water Board elections in The Netherlands, national elections in Austria, as well as being election coordinator for the 2020 USA general election and 2019 UK general election, and Ireland's 2020 general election.

During his time at university, he wrote his undergraduate dissertation on voter behaviour in the 2016 EU referendum in the South Wales Valleys after choosing to study both political and electoral geographies.

## Funding

All 20 observers deployed to observe the Danish local elections did so at their own cost or were supported from the general funds of the organisation. No finance was sought, or received, from any party or organisation, whether internal or external to Denmark, for the observation or this final report. Our observations are wholly independent of any institution.



*Figure 1 The Democracy Volunteers team of 20 observers received pre-deployment training online and in person in Copenhagen.*

## Credits

We would like to thank the local Kommunes in Denmark, and their election officials, for their assistance in making our preparations for deployment to Denmark possible. In addition, we would like to thank all the parliamentarians, staff, campaigns, agents, and journalists who gave up their time to meet with us during the observation.

We would also like to thank our team of observers who worked long hours and travelled extensively in Denmark to attend as many polling stations and counting centres as possible. As per our initial statement, Democracy Volunteers deployed 20 observers across Denmark in these elections. As a member of the Global Network of Domestic Election Monitors (GNDEM), Democracy Volunteers has an agreed code of conduct for observers. All observers are trained and briefed before deployment on polling day, and they sign the organisation's code of conduct before observing. Our observer teams observe in teams of two, completing an online form once they have made their observations in each polling station.

## Methodology

The mission deployed in two phases: an initial longer-term team was in Denmark for one week around the election, whilst an additional 16 short-term observers (STOs) deployed to Denmark for polling day and the days immediately preceding and following polling day.

The core team conducted interviews with interlocutors both before and after polling day (see Appendix A). These meetings included individuals from the campaigns, regulatory bodies and election administrators were held to assess the referendum process from multiple perspectives. This qualitative work aided the team in establishing the local political context of the referendum, in addition to clarifying the local electoral and operational processes surrounding polling day.

On polling day, the wider team attended polling stations across several local kommuner in addition to attending the verification and counting process at the end of polling day. The observation of each polling station was conducted in pairs to allow for objective observation and real-time verification of findings. Observers then agreed their findings for each polling station before submitting the data. The observation of each polling station generally took around 30 to 45 minutes, with observers ensuring that they witnessed the entire process, from the greeting of voters at the door by staff, to the casting of the ballot. The kommuner observed were:

- Brøndby
- Copenhagen
- Frederiksberg
- Gladsaxe
- Helsingør
- Odense

### In advance of Polling Day

The core team interviewed a number of staff at the kommuner in the areas that were intended to be observed. These were especially useful in a context where election observation is not formally accepted or legislated for.

In these meetings Democracy Volunteers explained the process of observation and how a deployment of a team of observers functions. All the staff were welcoming of the process of independent non-partisan observation and facilitated our observation by providing comprehensive lists of polling stations.

### Polling Day Observation

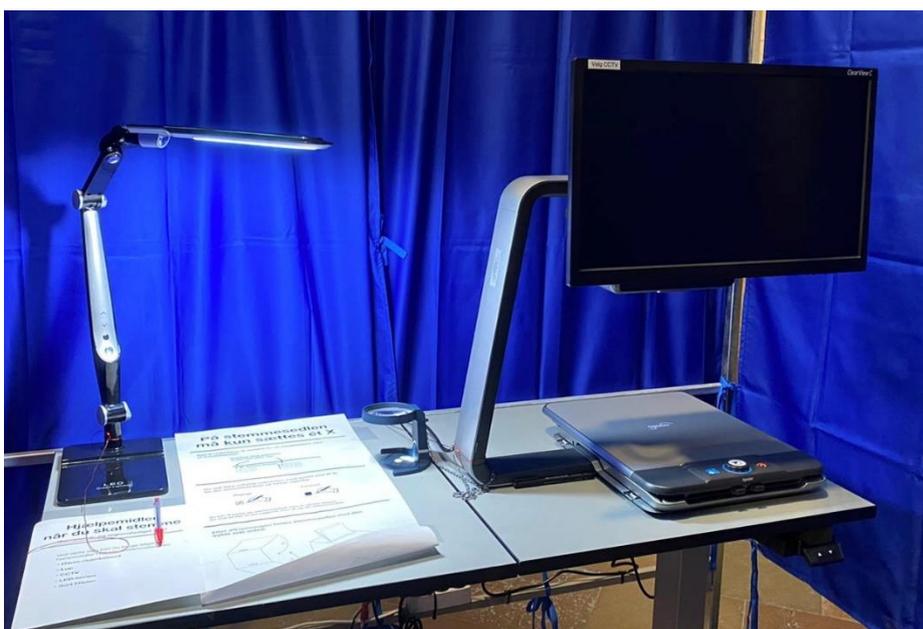
The organisation of polling stations was extremely well run across Denmark, with low levels of Family Voting being observed. Staff were very well-trained, and Presiding Officers were able to follow local electoral laws and additional guidance surrounding COVID-19. Polls were open from 8am to 8pm with observers being present at the opening and close of polls.

In Denmark, polling stations are large venues, such as the main hall of the city hall (in the case of Copenhagen) but also in public buildings such as schools.

Polling stations are public places in Denmark with the public being given reasonable access to voting, verification and counting. Verification and counting takes place inside the polling stations.



*Figure 2 Counting takes place inside polling stations (Permission received by Copenhagen City Council)*



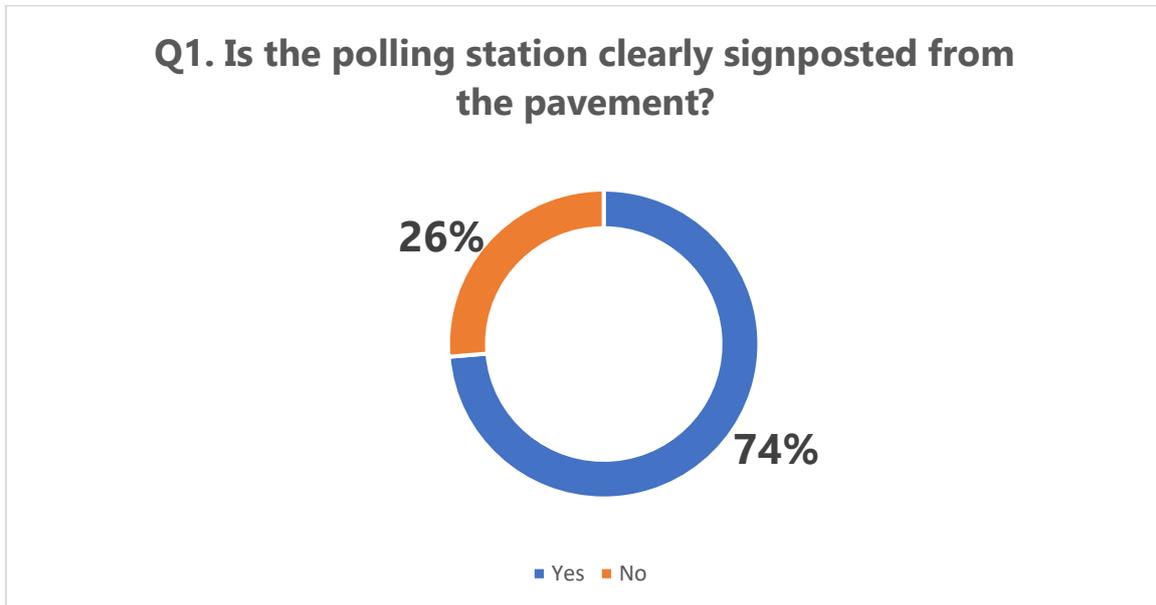
*Figure 3 Equipment for blind and partially sighted voters*

The team was impressed to see extensive equipment in place to assist blind and partially sighted voters as can be seen in figure 3.

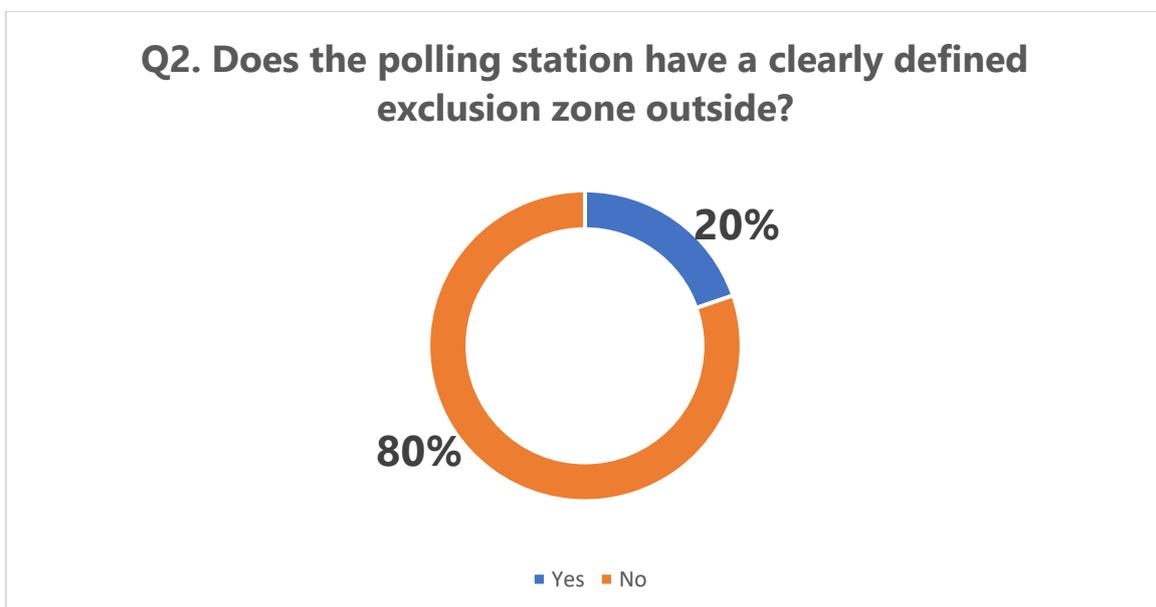
Because voting must be in person in Denmark this equipment was seen to be used at several points during polling day.

## Results of the Observation

The observers answered the following questions in order as they progressed with each observation at each polling station:

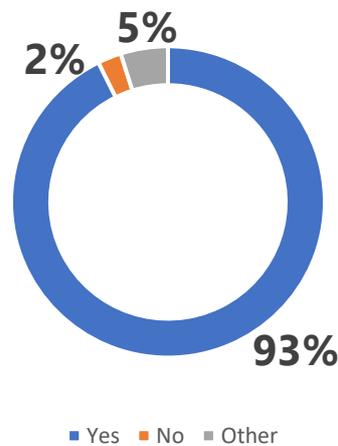


**QUESTION 1:** Signposting of the polling stations was generally good but with 20 not being clearly signposted. In addition to signage, most stations had an array of representatives and the public outside also making them visible. (N.85)



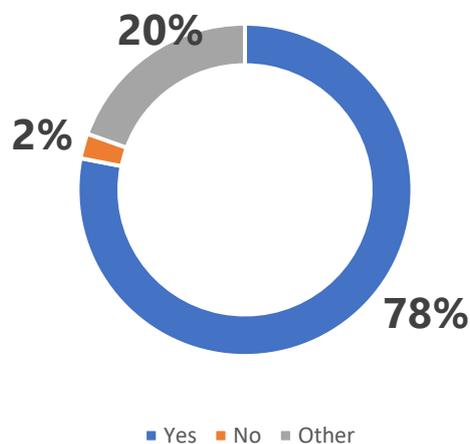
**QUESTION 2:** An exclusion zone was clearly marked for almost 20% polling stations. In many cases access to polling stations was well-marshalled by staff whether this was clear or not. (N.86)

### 3. When you have entered the Polling Station is it clear where the voter should report to?



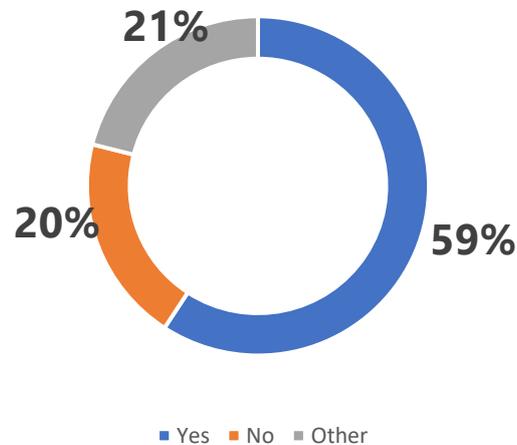
**QUESTION 3:** Observers identified only two polling stations in which it was not clear where the voter should report to. For the vast majority of polling stations, clearly visible desks and signage was used to direct voters, including in venues with two ballot boxes present. In these cases, there was minimal confusion of which side of the building to enter but when this did occur it was handled swiftly by polling staff. (N.86)

### 4. Having entered the polling station was it clear how disabled voters would access the Station?



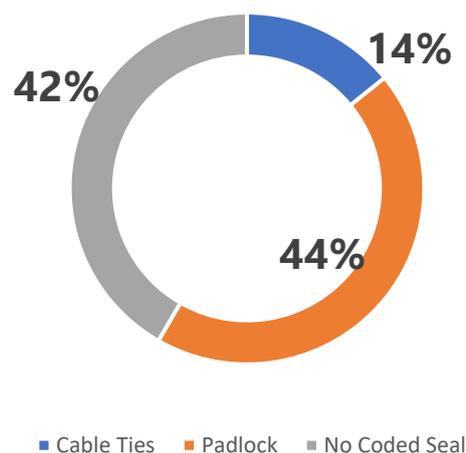
**QUESTION 4:** Disabled access was very good in 64 of the polling stations. Only in two stations was it unclear how disabled voters would access the building. Some observers noted that that in some cases ramp access was poor and caused some access issue which staff attempted to address. Other identified narrow doors which could lead to wheelchair access being impeded. (N.86)

### 5. Did the polling staff ask you who you are on arrival?

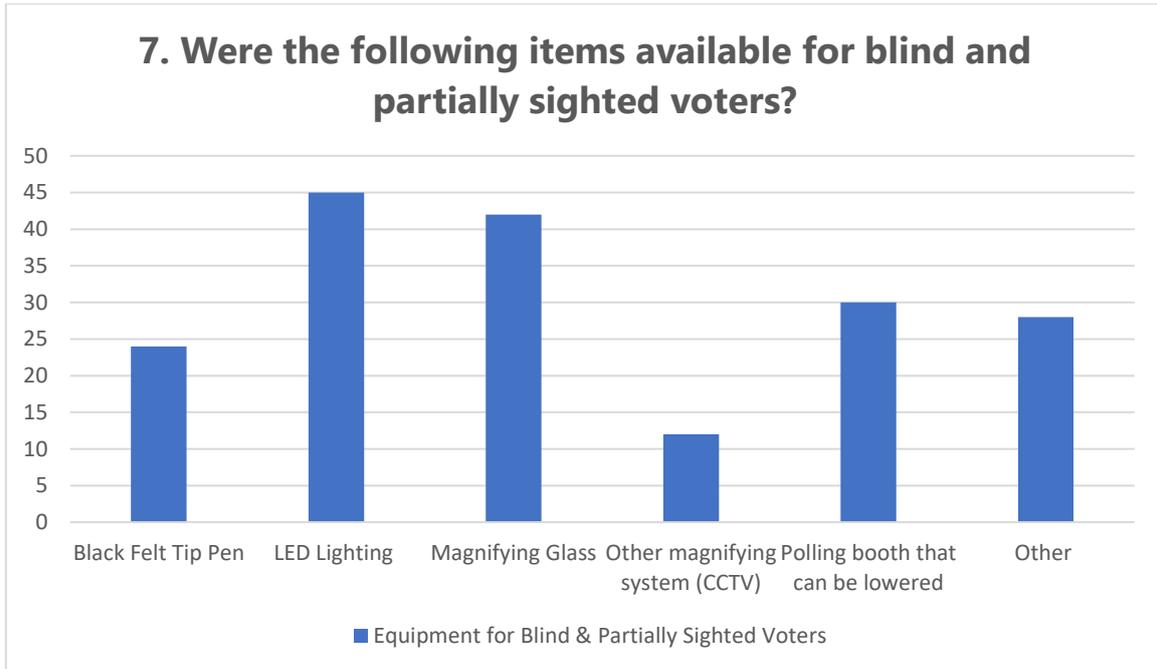


**QUESTION 5:** Polling staff were sometimes completely unaware that the observation team would be operating across Denmark on polling day. Some teams reported being asked who they were on arrival, but some were allowed to conduct their observations without question. On some occasions our observers were initially prevented from accessing polling stations despite this being unprovided for in Danish legislation. (N.82)

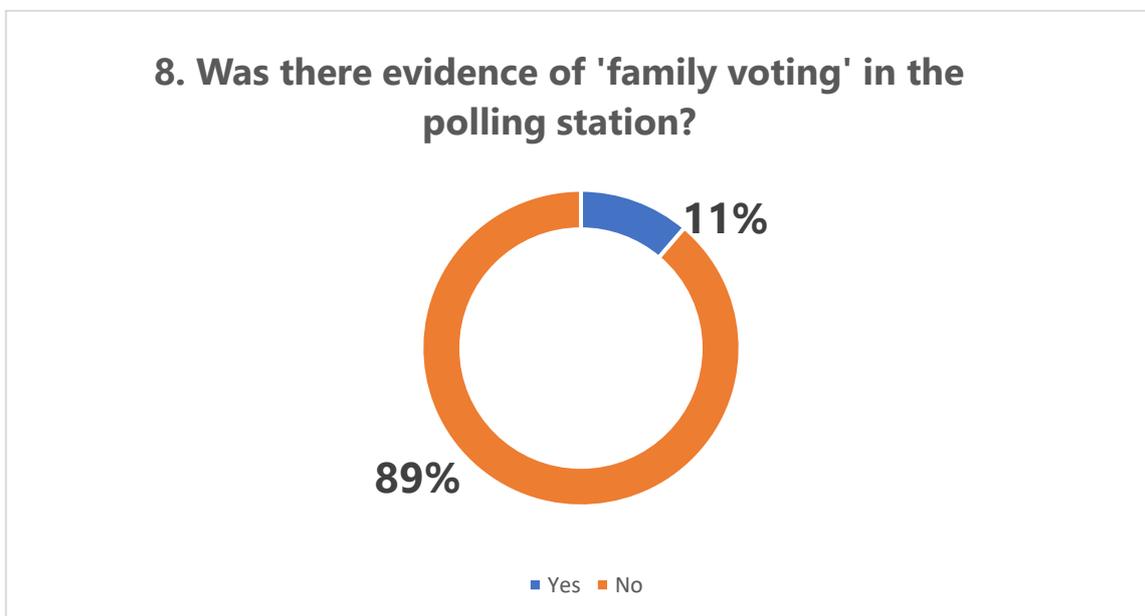
### 6. The Ballot Boxes should be completely sealed with either a padlock and or two numbered cable ties. Are they?



**QUESTION 6:** Ballot Box Security: Ballot box security is an important aspect of election integrity. Ballot boxes were often sealed with coded cable ties or padlocks, but many were simply sealed with Sellotape meaning they could have been reopened and resealed during the voting process. Indeed, in some polling stations, observers identified unmade up cardboard ballot boxes which could, in theory have been used to replace ballot boxes. (N.80)

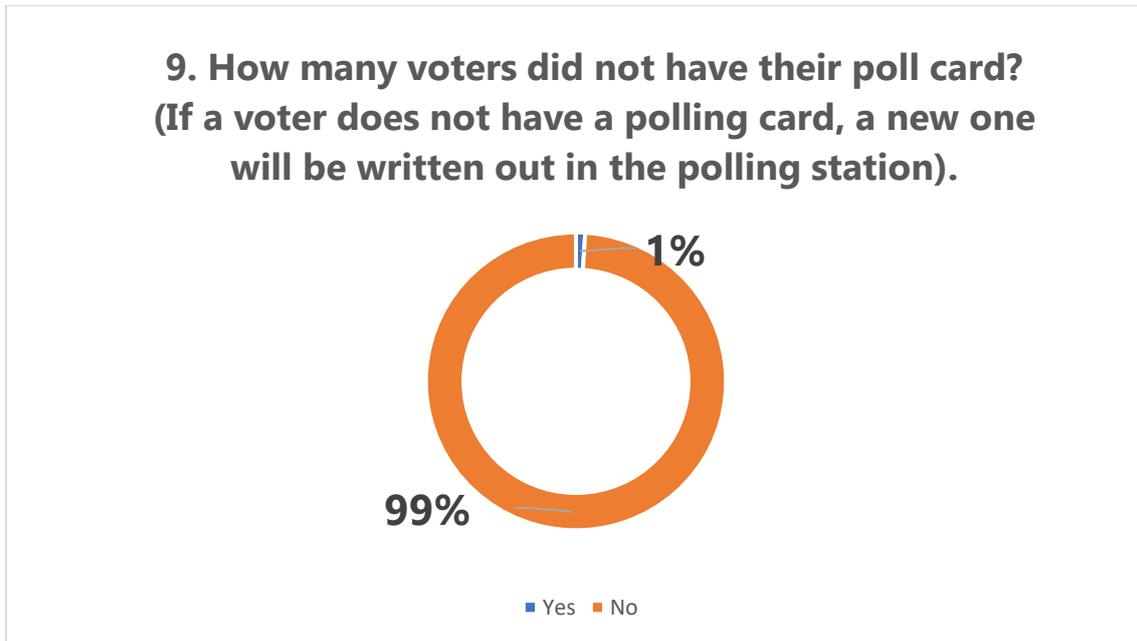


**QUESTION 7:** Many polling stations had a variety, or at least some, provisions in place to aid partially sighted and blind voters’ access to the voting process, with each Kommune having a designated station with additional equipment. These include simpler remedies such as black marker pens for completing ballot papers but also more advanced magnifying equipment to aid the partially sighted read the ballot papers independently. Whilst none of these might completely resolve the challenges faced by the blind and partially sighted, they were constructive mechanisms for improving access for this group. (N.76)

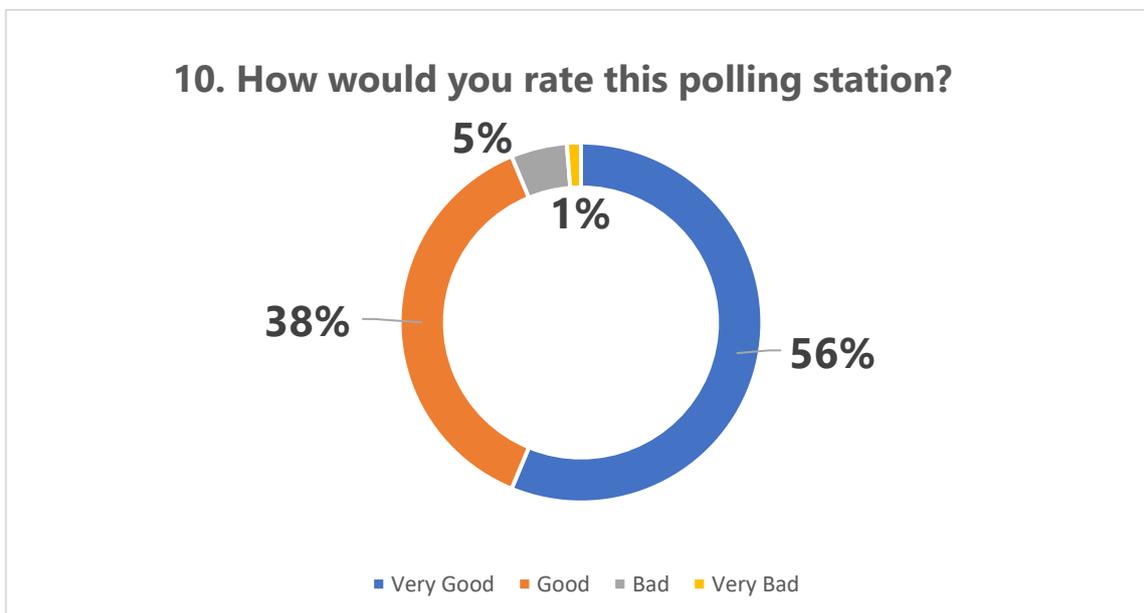


**QUESTION 8:** Family voting was observed in 9 polling stations. When compared with other elections our organisation has observed this is a relatively low percentage. However, when it did occur staff

invariably did not intervene. The OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections in Denmark, describes 'family voting' as an 'unacceptable practice'<sup>2</sup>. (N.86)



**QUESTION 9:** Voters must show their polling card in the polling station in Denmark or another one has to be produced. Based on our observations and comparing the number of voters who were required to be provided with another as well as those showing their ID this was approximately 1% of those attending polling stations. (N.15,846)



**QUESTION 10:** Observers were asked to give an overall rating for each polling station they attended. 56% of polling stations were reported as being 'Very Good', 38% were 'Good' and 6% of polling stations were reported as being 'Bad' or 'Very Bad'. (N.80)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.osce.org/>

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, the observer team was impressed with the very well-run elections conducted in the polling stations we attended. Voting was open and accessible to voters and the number of provisions put in place to give independent access to voters with disabilities was impressive. Polling stations are large and busy venues and staff are welcoming and efficient in processing voters. Like all elections, however, there are some challenges in the electoral process that we feel would benefit from consideration by national and local authorities at legislative and administrative levels.

Denmark is an advanced, inclusive, and engaged democracy with high voter engagement in local and regional elections with active debate and robust party activity.

### Legislation Providing for independent non-partisan Election Observation

The primary concern that the observer group had was the lack of clarity of access for independent non-partisan election observation. Whilst we were told by our interlocutors that voting was open and public, and as such election observation was lawful (if not legislated for), this understanding of the local context was not universally understood by staff. Because of this lack of clarity on three occasions our observers were either asked not to enter polling stations, watched closely by staff or even, on one occasion, threatened with arrest. On each occasion the Democracy Volunteers team contacted Copenhagen City Council to ensure that the local presiding officer at each polling station understood the rules and our observers were given access. However, if a larger team across a larger geographical area, with poorer communications had faced the same challenges, this could have resulted in the observers being detained – unlawfully. For obvious reasons we feel this is something that requires clarity in Danish law to bring Danish law in line with Denmark's commitments under the 1990 Copenhagen Agreement, which states in section 8:

*"The participating States consider that the presence of observers, both foreign and domestic, can enhance the electoral process for States in which elections are taking place. They therefore invite observers from any other CSCE participating States and any appropriate private institutions and organizations who may wish to do so to observe the course of their national election proceedings, to the extent permitted by law. They will also endeavour to facilitate similar access for election proceedings held below the national level. Such observers will undertake not to interfere in the electoral proceedings."<sup>3</sup>*

As no legislation is in place for election observers, and as such no accreditation process is in place and consequently training for those running polling stations has no need to deal with the attendance of observers, the process has a high degree of concern when observers might be present. Whilst the vast majority of polling staff were engaged and interested in our work, having a legal foundation upon which election observation can take place, would be

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<sup>3</sup> *The Copenhagen Agreement*, 1990. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/c/14304.pdf>

preferable in the future to a minority of events which might have led to the arrest of some of our observers despite their work being lawful. Thus, we recommend:

**R1:** The Danish Government, following consultation with Democracy Volunteers, the OSCE/ODIHR, and other interested election observation groups, should bring forward legislation to provide for election observation in Denmark and produce a process of accreditation.

### Ballot Box Security

As in many countries we observe there are numerous types of ballot boxes and consequently numerous ways to seal them. Where we saw coded cable ties and padlocks, we feel this met a good level of ballot box security, but often we saw cardboard ballot boxes sealed with tape, which could, in theory, be tampered with. Whilst we saw no evidence of ballot box tampering, we would suggest that ensuring that ballot boxes are demonstrably not tampered with is preferable to the belief they are not. As such we recommend:

**R2:** Ballot boxes should be clearly sealed at the beginning of polling and the seal should be coded to ensure they are unique and accepted by independent witnesses.

**R3:** Ballot boxes should be made of substantial material such as hard plastic or metal.

### Family Voting

Whilst arrangements in polling stations to prevent multiple voters entering polling booths is well-established, with use of curtains. Family voting still persists. We therefore recommend:

**R4:** More attention should be taken by polling staff to assess when family voting is taking place and to take measures to prevent it in the polling booth.

## **Appendix A: Interlocutors**

### **Local Election Administrators**

#### Copenhagen

Linnéa Künzel  
Kjartan Sveistrup Andsbjerg

#### Dragoer

Carsten Kjær-Knudsen  
Lena Bussadori Jansen  
Heidi Pabst Andersen

#### Gladsaxe

Jesper Graff Thøger

#### Frederiksberg

Merete Elisabeth Røder

#### Brøndby

Eva V. Gottlieb  
Birgitte Thygesen

#### Helsingør

Vivi Moseholm  
Birgitte Krohn Madsen

### **Political Parties**

#### Alternativet Political Party

Mark Desholm

#### Nye Borgerlige

Jesper Hammer

